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The REALTORS® National Center for Real Estate Research – REALTORS® NCRER – supports original research and analysis that informs real estate business decisions, provides context for public policy discussions, and illuminates the role of the real estate industry in the economy.

The Center is funded through the NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF REALTORS®, and underwrites research by experts from the nation's top universities and consulting firms. Studies supported by the REALTORS® NCRER examine a variety of topics in the residential and commercial real estate industries.

Reports from the REALTORS® NCRER are available to REALTORS, their clients, and others interested in issues affecting the real estate industry and America's property owners. Visit the Center's Web page at www.REALTOR.org/ncrer.

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Beyond Edgeless Cities: □
Office Geography in the New Metropolis

BEYOND EDGELESS CITIES:

OFFICE GEOGRAPHY IN THE NEW METROPOLIS

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- *Research on the suburbanization and growth of large cities highlights the complex interaction between population density and office and residential location.*
 - *This study examines the geography of office space in 13 large metropolitan markets. In particular, this analysis shows how office space in these areas is distributed across downtowns, edge cities and edgeless cities.*
 - *Edgeless cities contain a substantial share of all office space and will play a major role in the new metropolis. Some edgeless cities anchor moderately dense mixed-use development that includes housing and retail while others accentuate the negative effects of suburban sprawl.*
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Recent research has shown that describing the geographic distribution of office space is more complex than simply defining downtowns and suburbs. Observers such as Joel Garreau, author of the influential book *Edge City*, speculated that virtually all the office space found outside downtown was grouped in large, mixed-use clusters that he termed “edge cities.” The reality is that edge cities capture a modest share of non-central business district space. Robert Lang has shown in earlier research that “edgeless cities,” a smaller scale and dispersed commercial form, had almost double the office space found in edge cities.

THE STUDY

This study seeks to better understand edgeless cities. Further, it establishes a new geography for all metropolitan office locations by using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map the geographic distribution of office space in downtowns, edge cities and edgeless cities among 13 large metropolitan areas.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study suggest that a new geographic description of downtown and suburban office space is necessary to adequately describe the context and composition of office markets in large metropolitan areas. In particular:

- Edgeless cities, a small-scale and scattered form of commercial development, have a massive 1.2 billion square feet of office space.
- Edgeless cities account for almost 40 percent of the total office space in this survey. Downtowns follow with nearly 33 percent of space while edge cities have just over 14 percent.
- “Suburban” areas, or places with densities between 1,000 and 3,000 residents per square mile, account for just over a third of edgeless cities office space.
- New York and Chicago have by far the biggest downtowns and the largest share of their regional space located in central business districts
- The biggest share of edge city office space is found in Detroit, followed by Washington, DC and Dallas.
- New York has the largest amount of square footage in edgeless city space, but the biggest regional share of edgeless city office space is found in Miami.
- In total, over 160 million square feet of edgeless city office space lies in “transit-possible” neighborhoods with densities of at least 8,000 people per square mile.

Each of the 13 largest metropolitan areas is further analyzed with edge cities, edgeless cities and downtowns defined by the density and characteristics of the environment.

CONCLUSION

With the largest share of office space now located in suburbs outside of downtowns, it is increasingly important that planners, developers and REALTORS® understand the opportunities and challenges that this evolving urban form brings. As metropolitan areas grow, they will have to accommodate more and more office, retail and residential development. To the extent that suburban areas embrace greater densities they will continue to grow. This ability to grow is influenced by the makeup of the urban and suburban areas, and in particular the geographic characteristics of suburbs and submarkets outside of downtowns. This study defines several suburban forms based on office space location and density to more fully describe the opportunities that these areas can embrace through growth and enhanced transportation.